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Harbury's Day in Court

There have been few occasions in the past decade when both Rehnquist and Scalia have been silenced during oral arguments before the court. But this was one of them.

Almost exactly 10 years from the day that her husband, Efrain Bamaca-Velasquez, was seized by a Guatemalan military goon squad on the CIA's payroll, and later tortured to death, Jennifer Harbury addressed the US Supreme Court, asserting her right to sue Clinton administration officials who had withheld information about the US government's ties to Bamaca's killers.

On March 10, 1992, Bamaca, a leader of a Mayan resistance group, was captured by Guatemalan troops. Harbury was initially told by the Guatemalan government that he killed himself after being taken prisoner. But in early 1993 she learned from one of Bamaca's comrades, who been captured with Bamaca but who had later escaped, that Bamaca had been taken to the Santa Ana Berlin military base and was being tortured.

A frantic Harbury contacted officials at the Clinton White House and in the State Department and was told they knew nothing of his fate. But in 1994, after Harbury endured hunger strikes in Guatemala and in Washington, 60 Minutes reported that the US knew that Bamaca had been captured alive. A year later, Senator Robert Torricelli released classified documents showing that Bamaca had been tortured and killed on the orders of Col. Julio Roberto Alpirez, a School of the Americas graduate and a paid CIA informant. Alpirez had also been implicated in the murder of U.S. citizen Michael Devine.

In 1995, Harbury filed suit against officials in the State Department, NSC and CIA. Four years later, the US District Court dismissed the lawsuit, citing national security grounds. But in December of 2000, the US Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia reinstated the case. "We think it should be obvious to public officials that they may not affirmatively mislead citizens for the purpose of protecting themselves from suit", the court declared. The former Clinton aides, represented by Democratic Party attorney Richard Cordray, appealed to the Supreme Court and they were joined by the Bush Administration.

It's rare that the Supreme Court is faced with a plaintiff who is pleading her own case. Rarer still is the occasion when the justices are compelled to listen to a firsthand account of US government complicity in torture, murder and cover-up. But that's exactly what Harbury, a graduate of Harvard law school, did on March 18. In January, soon after the Court agreed to hear the case, Harbury applied for and received a license to argue before the high court. In so doing, she took over the case from Jodie Kelley, a lawyer at the Chicago firm of Jenner and Block, who with Harbury's assistance had won a favorable ruling at the appellate level.

Harbury's day of justice almost didn't happen. Her attorney Jodie Kelley urged Harbury not to take over the case. When Harbury rejected Kelley's advice, the lawyer grew peevish. "I was personally disappointed", Kelley told the American Lawyer magazine. "I spent a lot of time on this case." But Kelley didn't stop there. She quickly signed up as counsel for the Brennan Center for Justice, a liberal legal think-tank based at NYU, which had filed an amicus brief in the case. Kelley then petitioned the court, over Harbury's objections, to cede her 10 minutes of Harbury's 30-minute argument time, saying that she wanted to provide the

(**Harbury** *continued on page 2)*

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Our Little Secrets

justices "with a different perspective on the legal issues involved." Ultimately, the court sided with Harbury and didn't allow Kelley to present oral arguments.

Kelley's petulant behavior once again illustrates a problem that we have witnessed many times in environmental litigation. Public interest lawyers often pursue their own agendas, regardless of the desires of their clients. Kelley even went so far as to disclose to Supreme Court reporters some of her legal and strategic advice to her client.

Harbury understood what Kelley perhaps did not, that this case is both personal and political and that the justices of the Supreme Court themselves are nearly as complicit in the construction of the National Security State as Warren Christopher or Tony Lake. Harbury was able to look them in the eye, tell them her and Bamaca's story and, yes, make them feel, if only for a few minutes, very uncomfortable.

Harbury's suit charges that Clinton administration officials, including then-Secretary of State Warren Christopher, then-National Security Adviser Anthony Lake and five others, repeatedly lied to her about what they knew about Bamaca's true fate. These lies and deliberate deceptions, Harbury argues, violated her constitutional right of access to the courts. "But for those deceptive statements, I could have gone to court and saved his life…My day in court, when I could have saved my husband's life, was extinguished wrongfully", Harbury said. "There is no way I can recover that day."

Harbury was asked by Ruth Bader Ginsburg what she would have done if she had been able to take accurate information about her husband's capture to a federal court. "I would have sought an injunction prohibiting the CIA from requesting and paying for continued information being extracted by torture of a living prisoner." The importance of Harbury's case is more than historical.

Indeed, Harbury was able to force Ted Olson, solicitor general for the Bush administration, into making this argument to the court. To agree with Harbury's position, Olson warned, would be to "constitutionalize the Freedom of Information Act." (A law both the Clinton and Bush administrations have tried to bury.) "There are lots of different situations when the government has legitimate reasons to give out false information", Olson argued. Olson told the Court that they would undermine the war against terrorism if they ruled in favor of Harbury.

But Harbury wasn't having any of that. "This is about whether officials can lie when someone they are not at war with and who presents no national security threat is being tortured." Harbury now lives in Weslaco, Texas, where she works with Texas Legal Aid, Inc.

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Wild Men & Eclatarians

A couple of issues ago co-editor Cockburn wrote about the suicide of Jack Henry Abbott and also described a visit to UCLA where, after a debate with David Rieff and others on "the war on terror" about a dozen people repaired to a Siamese restaurant. Roberta Appleby, professor emerita, plumped herself down next to Cockburn and after nibbling on her fried noodles briskly conveyed what Cockburn described as her "eloquent revulsion" at Cockburn's writings down the years.

CounterPuncher Peter Linebaugh, whose brilliant history from below, The Many-Headed Hydra (co-authored with Marcus Rediker) should be on every bookshelf, sends us this note.

I once was the recipient of Professor Appleby's eloquent revulsion as well. She believed I did not understand 17th century Boston antinomianism, and she set me straight over canapés on a Huntington Museum patio. I knew her book, Economic Thought and Ideology in 17th Century England (1978), which was a trenchant exposition (following Schumpeter and Rubin) but totally without the critical method of Marx. Thus she was unable to admit an independence among the forces and ideas "from below" - savages, wildmen, mere Irish, 'sturdy rogues and beggars', commoners, 'prentices, not to mention Levellers etc. This was not a "blind spot", but a well-aimed snowball cast at Christopher Hill. It was a small academic preparation, in my opinion, for the avalanche of reaction that followed its publication - Thatcher, Reagan.

Abbott's murder in 1981 was a poignant moment for me as well, part of the political freeze. In the Belly of the Beast was a well-calculated ploy, an individualist's appeal to the New York Literary Ego of the Day - Norman Mailer, and it succeeded in luring him: first, to publication, second, to celebrity, third, to parole. What Mailer had not a clue about was Abbott's history inside.

There was a large-scale network, a church, among evidently white prisoners, called the Church of the New Song. This was back in the days when the AB, or Aryan Brotherhood, was relatively small potatoes. In both the federal system and in many state systems the Church and its votaries, called "éclatarians" made many bridges and connections within the carceral archipelago, providing, not so much an ethnic counterweight to the black Muslims, but further organization for some autonomy from the authorities and screws.

The Church of the New Song won lawsuits, it took a lead in self-defense, in education (Das Kapital for instance!), in gaining weekly steak dinners (as their religious rites required), and in self discipline on collectivist rather than individualist premises. Abbott had been active in the Church at the federal pen in Marion, Illinois, and then ditched the Church in order to run his New York con. What he learned, as expressed in his book, owes much to the prisoners in the Church, though this is unacknowledged. Thus, in unwillingness to embrace the warmth of "below," the glacier "above" inched forward.

Best wishes, Peter

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WHEN THE ADL BLINKED

"The law's delay, the insolence of office", as Hamlet once brooded. Nearly a decade passed between the murder of Harbury's husband and her day in court. And it took the same period for CounterPuncher Jeffrey Blankfort to exact retribution from the Anti Defamation League for one of the most infamous episodes in its history. Here's Jeffrey's resume of this revealing victory.

It began with the bust of a rogue San Francisco cop and one-time "black bag" CIA operative and ended ten years later with the nation's biggest Jewish "defense" agency forced to blink not once, but twice.

The first blink: In mid-February, 2002, the Anti-Defamation League agreed to pay three plaintiffs, Anne Poirier, Steve Zeltzer and myself, $178,000, including court costs to bring to a close a decade-long struggle that stemmed from the arrest by the FBI of San Francisco policeman, Tom Gerard, in December, 1992, for providing intelligence information to Israel and South Africa. Gerard fled to the Philippines, leaving behind a gym locker filled with phony passports, documents, and grisly photos and paraphernalia, apparent souvenirs of a two-year stint with the CIA teaching torture techniques to death squads in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras.

In April, 1993, San Francisco District Attorney Arlo Smith released 700 pages of documents to the public detailing Gerard's connections to the Anti-Defamation League, and implicating that organization in a vast and illegal spying operation directed against, but not limited to, activists opposed to Israel's policies in the Occupied West Bank and Gaza and to apartheid in South Africa and passing on information to both governments. Under intense political pressure and with a view towards running for the state's attorney general post, Smith later dropped the charges.

It was a useless gesture since his opening the case against the ADL so outraged the Democratic Party's big Jewish donors that they wouldn't give him a dime. Critics of Israel and apartheid figured largely among the 10,000 names found in the files of ADL's undercover operative, Roy Bullock. Helped by Gerard, Bullock kept tabs on more than 600 organizations. Besides pro-Palestinian and anti-apartheid groups the ADL's man spied on the San Francisco Labor Council and unions including ILWU Local 10, the Oakland Educational Association, and civil rights groups such as the NAACP, Irish Northern Aid, International Indian Treaty Council and the Asian Law Caucus.

Bullock, who had worked off the books for the ADL for more than 25 years, admitted that he had been paid $15,000 by South African intelligence for reporting on the activities of black South African exiles and American anti-apartheid organizers. He pointed out in a deposition that this required no additional work, since he was already spying on the same people for the ADL. The ADL's position on the African National Congress at the time was identical to that of both Israel and the South African government. They considered it to be a "terrorist" and "communist" organization.

Ten days before he was assassinated in South Africa, Chris Hani, the man who was expected to succeed Nelson Mandela as the country's president, was trailed by the ADL's and South Africa's spy, Bullock on a trip through California. Bullock filed reports on that trip and sent them to the South African government. ADL officials initially tried to pass Bullock off as an "independent investigator" but after that lie was questioned even in the Jewish press, they admitted to the nature of their lengthy relationship and, without apologizing for his work for South Africa, put Bullock directly on to their payroll.

Ten days before he was assassinated in South Africa, Chris Hani, the man who was expected to succeed Nelson Mandela as the country's president, was trailed by the ADL's spy, Bullock, on a trip through California.

In the mid-80s, Bullock infiltrated the American-Arab Anti- Discrimination Committee, pretending to be sympathetic to the Palestinian cause. Consequently, it was no surprise when he appeared at the initial meeting of the Labor Committee on the Middle East in 1987 at the home of plaintiff Steve Zeltzer. Blankfort and Zeltzer, who co-founded the committee, learned of Bullock's ADL connection soon afterward when they received a page from the newsletter of the Institute for Historical Review (IHR), the Orange County-based mothership of domestic Holocaust-deniers.

The newsletter reported that Bullock had been attending conventions of the IHR and accused him of having been an ADL agent for the previous 25 years. Zeltzer and I confronted Bullock with the article. He denied being an ADL informant but we found his explanation for attending the IHR convention disturbing. Bullock told us he had attended the Holocaust deniers conference in order to recruit new members for the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee and had put its literature on convention tables. Bullock appeared to be conceding a classic type of COINTEL operation, designed to link Arab-Americans, and in particular, the leading Arab-American defense organization, to neo-Nazis and anti-Semites.

After consulting attorney Pete McCloskey, a former congressman and himself a victim of the ADL and the Israel Lobby, Blankfort, Poirier and Zeltzer joined together with 16 other California activists in filing a suit against the ADL for violation of their privacy rights as provided under California law 1798.53. Since the filing of the suit, two of the plaintiffs, Colin Edwards and George Green died and 14 others withdrew.

Almost a decade later the last suit has been settled without the plaintiffs signing a confidentiality agreement which the ADL had previously insisted upon. The ADL's lead lawyer David Goldstein sent an agreement containing a strict confidentiality clause to McCloskey. The former congressman called Goldstein back and told him, "My clients won't sign that," and to send another agreement without that clause. Goldstein and the ADL complied. That was the second blink.

The ADL spent millions of dollars to stop the case from coming to trial. One of the more sinister pieces of information to emerge from the police search of Bullock's home and his files was that he had a floor plan and a key to the office of Alex Odeh, the director of the Orange County Chapter of the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee. Odeh was killed in a bomb blast at that same office by a Jewish terrorist who then fled to Israel. CP

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Bully America

By Alexander Cockburn

"We have pacified some thousands of the islanders & buried them; destroyed their fields; burned their villages, & turned their widows & orphans out-of-doors; furnished heartbreak by exile to some dozens of disagreeable patriots; subjugated the remaining ten millions by Benevolent Assimilation, which is the pious new name of the musket; we have acquired property in the three hundred concubines & other slaves of our business partner Sultan of Sulu, & hoisted our protecting flag over that swag. & so, by the Providences of God --& the phrase is the government's, not mine -- we are a World Power."

– Mark Twain

The spectacle of America swaggering down the street, jostling allies into the gutter, kicking treaties, covenants and solemn obligations into the garbage can, bellowing loutish threats to the world at large is nothing new, however much America's allies may be decrying the new uncouthness, with the British, French and German press shrill with fury at this supposed "new isolationism".

Anyone wanting to trace the ancestry of George Bush's self-righteous rhetoric about America's crusades against Evil will find its purest distillation in The Winning of the West, where this Teddy Roosevelt (Bush's favorite president) deals briskly with the issue of native American rights: "The truth is, the Indians never had any real title to the soil… The settler and the pioneer have at bottom had justice on their side; this great continent could not have been kept as nothing but a game preserve for squalid savages."

It's not so long a time-line between the American Indians self-righteously exterminated in the mid to late 19th century and the hot pursuit of Evil in the mountains of Eastern Afghanistan or in Baghdad or Somalia or the Philippines, or Indonesia and all the other nations where America has its task forces, uniformed or covert, intent on extermination of terror.

But is there not a novel, brazen edge to President Bush's insouciance toward the opinions of America's allies aghast at the treatment of Al Qaeda prisoners in Guantanamo, the bluster about the Axis of Evil, and most recently the flouting of WTO rules with the 30 per cent tariff imposed by the US on steel imports?

It's true. In terms of international decorum Bush is pushing the envelope, as is his secretary of defense Don Rumsfeld, a career lout who earned his stars in crudity back in Nixon-time. Before 9/11 Rumsfeld was being widely derided as a man hopelessly at sea in his vast domain. After the terror attacks Americans were in the mood for tough, even bloodthirsty talk and Rumsfeld has been supplying it ever since.

But the disdain for international treaties such as the Geneva conventions on the treatment of POWs or irksome restraints of WTO rules, have deeper roots than the discovery by Bush and Rumsfeld that the Wayne role still plays well in America.

Dislike for the United Nations has always been a staple of American conservatism, even though the isolationists had been effectively outmaneuvered from the very moment the UN was founded after World War Two. But some time in the mid 1970s erstwhile "internationalists" in both the conservative and liberal camps began to chafe at what they saw as intolerable restraints imposed by the UN on the ability of the US to do as it pleased.

"This great continent could not have been kept as nothing but a game preserve for squalid savages", Dubya's favorite president.

For conservatives it was treaties such as the Law of the Sea. Thirty years ago I remember the right-wing columnist William Safire, former speechwriter for Nixon, planting one tirade after another about the Law of the Sea in his allotted pasture on the New York Times opinion page. The always manic, but increasingly influential Wall Street Journal editorial page crackled with even more vivid indignation against treaties on arms control.

For their part many liberals, instinctively in favor of the UN and the brotherhood of nations, began to fret increasingly about UN insistence on a settlement in the Middle East and justice for Palestinians. Daniel Patrick Moynihan, paradigm coldwar Democrat, catapulted himself into the US Senate in 1976 with a campaign photo of his defiant No vote in the UN (where he had served as US ambassador) against a resolution equating Zionism with racism.

Of course the US and its allies had always held the upper hand in the UN, therefore esteeming it as a vital theater of operations in the cold war with the Soviet Union. But even before the Soviet Union collapsed the US was displaying increasing indifference to world opinion, as expressed in UN votes. Take as just one example UN condemnation of US attacks on Nicaragua in the 1980s. More than one vote had only Israel and maybe El Salvador siding with the US.

Then the World Court in the Hague condemned the US for its mining of a Nicaraguan harbor. The United States simply flipped its finger, announced it would ignore the Court and proceeded to establish Tribunals to try opponents such as Milosevic, whose challenges to tribunal's legitimacy have some merit. Since the US senses that even these Tribunals might become inconvenient it will abandon them too.

This is the coalition powering the latest bout of America-First bullying: Yahoo conservatism which is now dominant in the Republican Party, allied with almost all factions of the Democratic Party, which have Israel's supposed interests as a prime concern and which see Europe as supporters of Palestinian terrorism.

The first word to Twain, the last to Arnold Toynbee, writing in 1961: "America is today the leader of a worldwide anti-revolutionary movement in the defense of vested interests. She now stands for what Rome stood for. Rome consistently supported the rich against the poor in all foreign communities that fell under her sway; and, since the poor, so far, have always and everywhere been far more numerous than the rich, Rome's policy made for inequality, for injustice, and for the least happiness of the greatest number." CP

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The Executioner's Last Songs

BY JEFFREY ST. CLAIR

Jesse Helms' favorite rockstar, Bono, announced in a recent interview in Time magazine that he's given up on music as a political force. Good riddance, says CounterPunch, particularly as the field of battle is distinguished by artists who still believe that music has the ability not only to stir the soul but change the heart and minds of people willing to listen. One such artist is Jon Langford, who has been around longer than Bono and has never given up on the power of popular music to reach people and inspire them toward social change.

Langford is a leader of the great British punk band The Mekons, a group of Leeds University leftists and anarchists who, along with The Clash, The Sex Pistols and Gang of Four, produced some of the most politically-charged music of the late-1970s and 1980s. In fact, I'm not sure I could have survived the eighties without the knowledge that a new record by the Mekons could be expected every six months or so. They were a raucous counterpunch to the kind of musical fare we were being spoon-fed through the eighties (led by that trio of narcissists, Madonna, Michael Jackson, and Duran Duran), as the corporatization of rock was in full-bloom.

The Mekons made music their way: experimental and uncompromising. They'd read Marx, Tzara and Debord, but they also knew their Bob Wills, Bill Monroe and T-Bone Walker. Some of their records were odd, some truly bad, and some, such as Rock n' Roll, stand with the best music made in those decades.

While many other punk-influenced bands imploded, died off or retired, the Mekons, in their various guises (such as the Waco Boys and Pine Valley Cosmonauts), kept on making their own kind of music; often a species of punk-country; usually out of Chicago, once the city that electrified the blues, now an emerging center for neo-roots music.

There is no more potent symbol of state power than the death penalty. And its prevalence here offers a peephole into the true character of the American political system, where the execution of prisoners often serves as an offering to the electoral gods. Remember Rickey Ray Rector, the black, brain-damaged inmate Clinton rushed home to put to death in the heat of the 1992 campaign? Thus, it's scarcely surprising that upon relocating to the US Langford and his anarchist cohorts would soon begin to agitate, both musically and politically, for its abolition.

And it's also apt that when the time came to make a full-blown musical manifesto against the death penalty Langford chose to burrow into the American past to reinterpret old-time music, the music that came out of what Greil Marcus calls the Weird America, the Invisible Republic of cotton field workers and hillbillies, juke joints and charismatic churches.

There was a time when American music was filled with stories of everyday violence, the cruelties of prison life, vigilantism, mob violence and the horrors of execution. The old dialectic of freedom and confinement was at the core of the lyrical content of the regional music that gave birth to rock 'n roll. The blues, bluegrass, mountain ballads, Ur-country—roots music, as the labels market it today—all dealt frequently—even obsessively—with these themes that were so much a part of being poor and/or black in America. To a large extent this tradition of American music is being carried on these days only by hip-hop.

So now Langford and his Pine Valley Cosmonauts give us Executioner's Last Songs, a collection of 18 songs "of murder, mob law, and cruel, cruel punishment". The title of this release, from Chicago indie label Bloodshot Records, is at once a play on Norman Mailer's account of the 1977 killing by the State of Utah of Gary Gilmore (the first execution since the Supreme Court reinstituted the death penalty) and a prophesy. The band, with help of an amazing collection of like-minded artists, reworks music from the Louvin Brothers, Charley Pride, Johnny Paycheck, Cole Porter, Merle Haggard, the Stanley Brothers and Johnny Cash with the intent, according to Langford, "of consigning them to the realm of myth, memory and history".

The proceeds from the album will go to the Illinois Death Penalty Moratorium Project, which has done unyielding work on behalf of death row inmates over the past few years. In the outside world, this toil is largely thankless, but in 2001 17 people in the state of Illinois alone walked off Death Row, in part due to the project's tireless efforts.

But let's be clear. The real movement against the death penalty isn't only about keeping innocent people from being killed by the state. What rational person (WARNING: Antonin Scalia is NOT a rational person) would not be opposed to the killing of innocents? No. This is about abolition, period.

The rising tide of executions (there have been 763 killings since Gilmore, with more than half of those done in the last five years) is America's equivalent of Argentina's so-called dirty war, where hundreds of souls are carted off to their doom with little hope of appeal. Call them America's disappeared.

There are now more than 3,700 prisoners on death row, with a new one being added nearly every other day. States, led by the killing machines of Texas and Florida, are putting to death women, chil-

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dren, the sick and the mentally-ill. Meanwhile, constitutional rights to effective counsel, a jury of your peers (people who oppose the death penalty are not permitted to serve on juries in death penalty cases) and habeas corpus have been gutted.

Executioners' Last Songs isn't a No Nukes or We Are the World type endeavor. It's a fierce, oppositional enterprise. Artists who take on this cause in a serious way—such as Springsteen, Steve Earle, and Langford and company—do so at some risk to their livelihood. It's one thing to attach yourself to a cause like saving the Amazonian rainforest and quite another matter entirely, in this nation at least, to demand that the state should not have the legal or moral right to kill prisoners, even if they have committed unspeakable crimes.

But though the issue is almost unbearably grim, there's nothing solemn or preachy in this offering, no pious sermonizing or Bono-like preening for the cameras. There is, however, a blistering rant—in all the best senses of that word—by Tony Fitzpatrick. With a nod to Dylan, Fitzpatrick titles his call-to-arms Idiot Whistle: "Politicians love the death penalty because it makes a bunch of candy-asses look like tough guys."

The music moves through its own stages of grieving and lamentation, puzzlement, revulsion, querulousness and outrage: from the lovely and gifted Neko Case's elegaic Poor Ellen Smith and the Faulknerian black comedy of Jenny Toomey's Miss Otis Regrets to The Aluminum Group's 25 Minutes to Go (a bracing countdown to an execution) and Rick Sherry's full-throttle version of Don't Look at the Hanged Man.

The Advert's 1977 punk classic Gary Gilmore's Eyes is countryfied by Deano from the Waco Boys' with help of Sally Timms from the Mekons. The inimitable LA alt-country phenom Rosie Flores sings, with a voice somewhere between Melba Montgomery and Iris Dement, Hank Williams' I'll Never Get Out of this Place Alive. Steve Earle breathes new life into Tom Dooley, making that old story sound urgent, new and familiar all at the same time. To my mind, Earle is the most compelling American rocker out there today. He's certainly the most interesting, producing music that just keeps getting better and deeper. Earle's got a voice that can chill your spine and a guitar-style as raw and accomplished as anything hatched by the great westside Chicago bluesman Hounddog Taylor.

Remember George Bush and Karla Faye Tucker? Langford and Johnny Dowd do in their song Judgement Day: "God gave her life, but the mighty state of Texas took it away. She's dead. Gone. To a better place. The governor's so ashamed he won't even show his face….Just one thing I want to say: She ain't the only one facing the Lord on Judgement Day."

Chicagoan Diane Izzo contributes a defiant version of the sinister ballad, Oh Death. Her exquisitely eroded voice reclaims the old Dock Boggs song from the malign purposes it was put to in the Coen Brothers' offensive minstrelsy-show of a film, Oh, Brother Where Art Thou, where Ralph Stanley's resigned voice is outrageously rerouted through the mouth of a Klansman.

Last phone calls. Last letters. Last kisses. Last meals. Last songs. Dreams of escape, freedom and commutation. Last prayers to Jesus, Allah, Elvis. Final goodbyes. It's all here in the songs; the unspeakably cruel circumstances of everyday life on America's death row.

The CD closes with Paul Burch's assured version of Walls of Time, a beautiful bluegrass tune penned by Peter Rowan, which became a signature song for Bill Monroe. It's a kind of ghost story, really, a ghost story that ends on a quavering note of love, reunion and redemption.

Music isn't going to lead the way to radical change (that's going to take lawyers, organizers, activists, politicians and judges with courage), but it sure as hell can provide the marching tunes. Langford and friends have given us an unexpected message of hope amidst the bleakest of circumstances. Hope through struggle, that is.

Remember George Bush and Karla Faye Tucker? Langford and Johnny Dowd do in their song Judgement Day

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Bamaca's Ghost Stalks the Supreme Court

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